DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 069 835 UD 013 064

AUTHOR	Myers, Ernest R.
TITLE	Ecological Dynamics of the Inner City: Implications for Community Psychology.
PUB DATE	72
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association Conference, 1972
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Black Community; Community Resources; Community Role; *Community Study; Curriculum Development; *Ecological Factors; Ecology; *Inner City; Intervention; Neighborhood; Power Structure; *Professional Training; *Psychologists; Psychology; Social Structure

ABSTRACT

If community psychology is a discipline of principles, methods, and techniques designed to adapt tomorrow's psychologists to a community orientation and commitment, then ecological parameters necessarily become fundamental concerns. It is no revelation that urban America, particularly the central city, is characteristically the home site of "Black America." What are the ecological implications of this life style, or pattern, for community psychology's development? A fundamental implication for community psychology curricula suggests an emphasis on the phenomena of power and oppression in community dynamics. It is within this framework that the community psychologist can be seen as a "social interventionist" with a mission of assisting the power structure or bureaucracy to become more responsive to the needs of its clientele while simultaneously promoting people power by assisting community residents to cope and deal with the system's institutions. One means of implementing this educational process is to focus on a given neighborhood base. Further, it seems appropriate to attempt to study the role as community resources of selected neighborhood-based community institutions for both the people they serve and the power structure with which they interface. (Author/JM)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 069835

* Presented at the Eastern Psychological Association 1972 Conference

Ernest R. Myers
5315 Colorado Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20011

* ECOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF THE INNER CITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

by

© Ernest R. Myers 1972

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Ernest R. Myers TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

Introduction

The human ecological dynamics of the "inner city" have implicitly become a foremost laboratory site of behavioral scientists, particularly during the 1960's. Witness, for example, the ghetto arena as the locale of the conceptual origin of community psychology where community mental health centers conducted their initial experiments; the enactment of legislation for ecological studies; the increasing developments in urban renewal programs; the emergence of urban affairs degree programs in institutions of higher education; and so on--all precipitated largely by the "urban crisis."

UD 013064

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

If indeed community psychology is a discipline of principles, methods and techniques designed to adapt tomorrow's psychologists to a community orientation and commitment, then ecological parameters necessarily become fundamental concerns.

A Core Issue

It is no revelation that urban America, particularly the central city, is characteristically the home site of "Black America." What, then, are the ecological implications of this life style, or pattern, for community psychology's development? It appears that a fundamental implication for community psychology curricula suggests a curricular content emphasis on the phenomena of power and oppression in community dynamics. It is within this framework that the community psychologist can be seen as a "social interventionist" with a mission of assisting the power structure or bureaucracy to become more responsive to the needs of its clientele while simultaneously promoting people power by assisting community residents to cope and deal with the system's institutions. One means of implementing this educational process is to focus on a delineated geographical community, that is, a given neighborhood base. Further, it seems appropriate to attempt to determine the impact of selected neighborhood-based community institutions in order to study, analyze and define such institutions' institutional roles as community resources for both the people they serve and the power structure with which they interface.

The rubric of this educational approach is based on the view that the relevance of a community institution is substantially determined by the extent to which the given institution is purposively founded and operating in full

cognizance of the ecological characteristics and dynamics of the community it serves. However, to gain clarity of focus on The Ecological Dynamics of the Inner City, it may be beneficial to view human ecology and the genesis of the "ghetto" in retrospect.

Human Ecology and the Birth of Its Ghetto

Historical analysis demonstrate that the past has often possessed a plethora of prophecy as well as prologue. Classical human ecological research of the 1920's and 1930's brought forth the Burgess Concentric Zone Theory, demonstrating definite spatial and distance relationships with the "inner" or central city as these variables interfaced with variables of housing conditions, crime rates, mental illness, immigrants and proportions of blacks populating the various areas of the model metropolis. (Ross, 1965)

Human ecology, in the North American context, has fundamentally been rooted in the analyses of urbanization and its symbiotic consequences and impact on human life styles. Hawley has stated:

> "...ecology is essentially the study of the survival of life... concerning the elemental problem of how growing, multiplying being maintain themselves in a constantly changing but ever restricted environment...the focus is upon the population which is either organized or in process of becoming organized..." (Hawley, 1965)

The early human ecology works of Burgess, Hoyt, and so on, were, significantly, sociological in method with emphasis on socio-economic factors relative to urbanization. These fascinating models of urban dynamics embraced a mystical mask implying, in part, a belief in a natural order of

evolution in the urban community development phenomenon. The gap of inter-dependence of resources and people was, it appears, almost interpreted as a natural phenomenon for those "new" or "undesirable" citizens (immigrants and blacks)--a gap which would be narrowed or closed through the process of naturalization, education, and mobility. Thus, the central or "inner" city dweller, upon first gaining the credibility or legitimacy of citizenship, and secondly obtaining education and skills, would therefore possess the mobility inherent in this newly acquired socio-economic status to ultimately reject the inequities of the "ghetto" and take his rightful place in suburbia. White immigrants and black migrants, then, had much to look forward to--"rugged individualism" could do wonders. Meanwhile, the Federal Government, during the peak period of these rhetorical formulations in ecology and urbanization in the 1930's, prepared to launch "New Deal" housing programs which, in effect, brought governmental support for the continuation of the development of ghettoized communities. In the 1930's, the Federal policy of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) expressed the attitude of private housing industry. These FHA stipulations in the "underwriting manual" of 1938 stated:

> "It is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied in the same social and racial groups. It is further recommended the use of restrictive covenants to insure the harmonious practice." (FHA Underwriting Manual, Section 937, 1938)

Over thirty years later, nearly three-quarters of all America's black citizenry, outside the South, reside in the core cities of metropolitan areas.

One-third of these northern black urbanites live in areas of concentrated poverty. (Time-Life Books, 1968) The demographic realities of these areas are known to us all--substandard housing, high crime rates, pathetically high levels of unemployment, inadequate transportation systems, unhealthy air and water polution, weakening educational systems, and so on.

As if inner city deterioration is not enough, the dragon of institutional racism hovers over these dying areas like a vulture in quest of delectable powerless victims. Indeed, the ecological dynamics of the "ghetto" are abysmal even to academic optimists. Tomorrow's challenge awaits the coming of the new breed of urban problem solver, advocate, agent of change, catalyst, analyst, organizer, interventionist. Perhaps these roles describe the emerging community psychologist--a new kind of "superstar" of the human sciences and helping professions. Yet, we must not oversell the promise of solutions yet to be discovered. The community psychologist would be wise to note the counsel often given to graduate level social workers - I remember it well - "Social work is the art of a science as yet undiscovered." Community Psychology is deeply engrossed in discovering its stage of maturation, while taking the risks of exploratory preparations and training of this new breed of professional helper.

Federal City College: A Case of Ecological Impact

My formal research experiences at Federal City College point out an important institutional role in the ecological dynamics of the predominately black Washington, D. C. community. Its establishment in 1968 represented an effort to create a unique model of public higher education responsive to its

environment and its clientele which heretofore was inadequately served by other education centers in the Nation's Capitol. Programs and policies for open admissions, community education and community service based on its land grant status obligations, college-prison programs co-sponsored by the city correctional department, high tuition subsidy by the Federal system, and so on, have set the stage for unmitigated "relevance." (Myers, 1971)

Ecologically, Federal City College (FCC), in the the field theory context, is a vital hub in the D. C. community. It is a dynamic element of its environment--the city--interacting with the forces of the Federal City with a multitude of outreach activities in efforts to create new states of equilibrium within the field. As a complex configuration FCC seeks to make an impact and to experience institutional change itself--physically, socially, politically, economically, and psychologically. It is the only urban land grant institution of higher learning in the nation and faces the demands of meeting educational needs of a predominantly black populated metropolis. The comminity outreach impact of this relatively young institution, to date, can in large measure be attributed to its commitment through programs which promote viable college-community relations. (Myers, 1971)

The impact and legitimacy of community psychology's role will, like FCC, depend heavily on its commitment to community service as both laboratory and operation base for greater and more direct involvement of the psychologist in human and public affairs--heretofore, unheard of. (Iscoe, Spielberger, Kelly, 1968; Kelly, 1971)

A Federal Resource

The Environmental Education Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-516) represents recent Federal response to the crises of overpopulation, mismanagement of resources, air and water pollution and increasing urbanication wherein 70 per cent of the nation's people occupy only two per cent of the land. Out of nearly 2,000 grant applications for these F.Y. 1971 funds, only 74 projects were funded. The Frederick Douglass United Community Center in Anacostia (D.C.) was one of these projects and is located in the same neighborhood as the Anacostia Museum where one of our "budding" community psychologists is performing his practicum activity which happens to be his place of employment. Significantly, this neighborhood museum emerged subsequent to the "hot summer" syndrome. It is anatomically a part of the world-famous Smithsonian Institute of "uptown" Washington, D.C. and combines community with "cultural enrichment."

General Training Implications

Opollo 16 has put more men and footprints on the moon. Importantly, the astromauts are trained to relate and cope effectively with the moon's environment in simulated earth-bound laboratories. The training for community psychologists must necessarily include exposure and experiences in environments as similar as possible to those locales wherein his services will be rendered. Consequently, if this premise is valid, the community psychologist of the ghetto or inner city must be trained in the laboratory of the ghetto's life style. This will be a more complex challenge for educational institutions not located in or interfacing predominately with the central city. An assumption is being made that the conduct of community

psychology in suburbia, for example, requires a different set of sensitivities--interpersonally and institutionally--on the part of practitioners because here we are distinguishing between the "powerless" and the "powerful." It is in this context that the advocates of Black Psychology have planted the "roots of theory" for further conceptualizing in the community psychology arena toward a more "soulful" application of psychology. (Myers, 1971)

In view of the amorphous and evolutionary state of community psychology, which was conceptualized through clinical psychology's experimentations in the inner city or the "dark ghetto," as amply put by Dr. Kenneth Clark, I would also recommend the following training guidelines for furthering the objectives of this new discipline:

1. Didactic and practicum experiences emphasizing the development of skills in organizational and policy analyses of community institutions. (Institutional resources too often represent the power forces and political bases perpetuating institutional racism, unresponsive service delivery systems, artificial barriers of inappropriate eligibility standards, and, in general, mysterious walls of resistance to social progress.)
2. Human and intergroup relations training to impart sophisticated levels of skills in group work in general and interracial group work in particular. The rationale for this suggestion is based on an earlier-mentioned point, namely, that often the community psychologist will be challenged to work and interface

effectively in liaison between the "powerful" and the "powerless," that is, the traditional decision-makers versus the consumers of service. Rapping and interacting with professional finesse require a vast repertoire of knowledge, sensitivity and techniques in human relations not necessarily acquired in the traditional higher education learning models.

3. Greater utilization of practicum sites indigenous to the inner city client's life style as opposed to traditional establishment types of institutions.
4. Emphasis on political dynamics underlying decisions of program priorities, institutional arrangements, human service delivery systems, decentralization, community control of services, and other pertinent issues being stressed in the 1970's for urban crises intervention.
5. Operational research as opposed to basic clinical studies. The community psychologist will face the same resistance as has his clinical counterpart in the conduct of research unless these activities are perceived as service-rendering to the "subjects."
6. Attempts to experiment with and formulate new psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic theories and techniques which are more applicable to those whose personal development has essentially been restricted to the inner city terrain and culture, i.e.,

a different slant for aspects of ecological psychology--a phenomenon of human development of minority psychic patterns which may be interpreted as both offense and defense mechanisms to cope with environmental and human hostilities.

Purlie Victorious, the black minister in the musical "Purlie" has a similar message: "We want our cut of the Constitution, and we want it now, and not with a teaspoon, white folks--throw it at us with a shovel!"

There is also room in the "Amen Corner" for the Community Psychologist.

REFERENCES

1. Barker, R. G., Ecological Psychology, American Psychologist Journal, Stanford University Press, 1968

2. Iscoe, Ira and C. D. Spielberger, Community Psychology: Perspectives in Training and Research, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Meredith Corp., 1970

3. Kelly, James G., Qualities for the Community Psychologist, American Psychologist, 1971

4. Lasswell, Burma and Aronson, Life in Society, Scott, Foresman and Co., 1965

5. Myers, Ernest R., An Exploratory Study of an Urban University, Interface Prototype, College-Community Evaluation Office, Federal City College, March, 1971 (Published by U. S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, Educational Research Information Center (ERIC))

6. Myers, Ernest R., Black Perspectives of Community Psychology, Division 27, Community Psychology Symposium, American Psychological Association Convention Presentation, September, 1971

7. Myers, Ernest R., Federal Housing Programs--An Evaluation from 1935-64 (Mimeograph)

8. The New Environmental Education Program of the U. S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D. C. (A brochure), 1971